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ABSTRACT

Culled from ideas contributed by people attending conferences of the National Council of Teachers of English and by readers of "NOTES Plus" and "IDEAS Plus," the activities contained in this booklet are intended to promote the effective teaching of writing and literature. Teaching strategies offered in the first section of the booklet involve prewriting and writing. They include activities in which students invent stories; use instrumental music to explore mood; write what they know; look for help in writing transitions by using the "National Enquirer"; write friendly letters; and write books in which they are the main characters. In the activities of the second section, which are designed to teach students to read and learn actively, thoughtfully, and critically, students: explore Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales" and the concept of the pilgrimage; use popular music to make a connection with "Romeo and Juliet"; consider peer recommendations for reading motivation; respond to "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" by writing about a place where they feel as Huck does on his raft; think about what they value most in preparation for reading and discussing "King Lear"; and use short film clips from different interpretations of "Hamlet" to help them compare the artistic choices of actors and directors. Among the teaching ideas in the third section are a student-centered approach to planning service learning projects; a suggestion for giving student experts center stage in the classroom; a way to use color to help both teacher and students see patterns in students' writing; and a 3-D poster project that gives full rein to students' creative powers. (RS)

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IDEAS plus

PRACTICAL CLASSROOM IDEAS BY TEACHERS FOR TEACHERS

IDEAS Plus

A Collection of Practical Teaching Ideas

Book Sixteen

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Contents

Foreword v

1. Prewriting and Writing
   - Empowering Students to Invent Stories 7
   - Using Instrumental Music to Explore Mood 8
   - Write What You Know 10
   - House Stories 11
   - Lacking Transitions? Look for Help in the *National Enquirer* 13
   - An Effective Method of Teaching the Friendly Letter 14
   - Buddy Books 17

2. Literature
   - Another Way of Looking at a Blackbird 20
   - Helping Reluctant Readers with a "Good Books Bibliography" 22
   - Where Is Your River? 23
   - What Is Love? 24
   - King Lear's Losses 26
   - Modern-Day Travelers 27
   - Using Varying Film Interpretations to Explore Scenes from *Hamlet* 31

3. Explorations
   - Student-Designed Community Service Learning 43
   - That Was Then & This Is Now 46

Experts Share Their Skills 48
Adding Color to Student Essays 50
Visual Essays 51

Indexes 53

Foreword

IDEAS Plus and its quarterly companion *NOTES Plus* are the principal benefits of *NCTE Plus* membership.

The ideas collected in this sixteenth edition of *IDEAS Plus* come from two sources: ideas submitted at an Idea Exchange session at an NCTE Annual Convention or Spring Conference, and contributions by readers of *NOTES Plus* and *IDEAS Plus*.

Some of the teaching practices described here are innovative and surprising; others are adaptations on familiar ideas. Your own ingenuity will doubtless come in handy as you customize these approaches for your students.

Feel free to send us a teaching practice of your own to share with *NCTE Plus* members. Submissions for consideration may be mailed to *IDEAS Plus/NOTES Plus*, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801-1096; or sent by e-mail to notesplus@ncte.org.

1 Prewriting and Writing

Prewriting and writing activities let students imagine, describe, and give order to the world of their feelings and experiences. Such writing experiences also help students analyze, understand, and respond to the world outside the classroom. As you involve your students in the activities in this section, you'll find your students reading, questioning, writing stories, writing for younger students, demonstrating special hobbies and skills, and pursuing a variety of other valuable learning experiences.

Empowering Students to Invent Stories

My students like fantasy—they enjoy remembering how they thought as young children and expressing the inventive and whimsical sides of their personalities. They have responded enthusiastically to the following short story assignment; the preliminary activities themselves have also encouraged students to think creatively.

My favorite prewriting activities include having students talk about and freewrite stories inspired from Chris Van Alsberg's *The Mysteries of Harris Burdock* (available both in book and poster form). Students love the pictures, thrive when asked to make up tales, and especially enjoy hearing what others have thought up. We also read Van Alsberg's *Jumanji* together, and talk about variations on a game-gone-wrong structure. Students enjoy reminiscing about personal experiences with games and playing. We talk about how young children like order and predictability, but are also inventive and imagine seemingly illogical experiences.

The general story-writing assignment that I use has the following parameters:

1. The story needs to begin normally.
2. Something bizarre, strange, different, or abnormal then happens. Some possible variations are: *a dream sequence, a jour-*

ney, a strange visitor, a game gone wrong, or *a historical or fictional character displaced in new setting.*

3. The story returns to, or ends in a way similar to, the beginning.

Students enjoy knowing they don't have to figure out a way to end the story—it's okay if the ending seems rather abrupt or contrived (e.g., a character wakes up). The focus of the assignment is not to give a believable resolution to the conflict. Even so, the sequences they've come up with for the middle of their tales have shown ingenuity and incredible detail.

Students' variations on the story structure are inspiring. Some of my favorite student stories include the following plot elements: *James Bond rescues King Arthur; a Twister game in which the kids' arms and legs stretch to reach their spaces until one kid messes it up by trying to reach a cookie jar; a deck of cards that comes to life—the suits fight each other in the living room until the King of Hearts is defeated; and a family home that is plagued by indescribable brown goop and a monsoon—which turns out to be the story of a five-year old girl who tries to save an ice cream cone that has fallen and is melting onto her doll house.*

I've also used other combinations of pre-writing activities before students write stories. Some of my favorites are writing or drawing storyboards or imagining and describing film sequences for Van Alsberg books; conducting interviews of misplaced characters (letting students ad lib responses); writing journal entries such as *what I did in my free time as a child, my favorite childhood game, what I was scared of as a child, a strange dream I remember, a strange place to visit, my favorite fictional character.*

Eve M. Gerken, Concordia Lutheran High School, Fort Wayne, Indiana

Using Instrumental Music to Explore Mood

This activity helps students understand the role mood plays in a piece of writing, and how details can be used to create that mood.

Announce that the class will be beginning a writing activity, and be sure every student is prepared with paper, a pen, and a desk clear from distractions. (It may be helpful to hang a sign outside

the door to prevent interruptions.)

Begin by placing this creative writing prompt (or one-of your own) on the board or overhead projector: "As I lowered my head and closed my eyes, I felt the soft touch of the rain against my neck. . . ."

Ask students to write freely from the prompt, and begin playing a cassette or CD recording of Elton John's instrumental piece, *Funeral for a Friend.* (Don't announce the title of the piece.) Tell students that they will have an opportunity to share their writing at the end of class, but ask them to refrain from discussion until the next part of the activity is completed.

When the piece has ended, ask students to stop writing. Now put on a more upbeat piece, such as the final musical interlude from Disney's *The Lion King,* and again ask students to write freely.

When the piece has ended and students have stopped writing, ask students to look over their two writings and to compare them. Helpful questions may include: Do the two writings seem different? Are there parts of this writing that evoke feelings or a mood? What specific words or phrases would you pick out as creating strong feelings or a mood?

There are usually obvious differences in the writings prompted by the two musical pieces, and students enjoy noting these, as well as the similarities found among the "upbeat" writings and among the "downbeat" writings. I like to bring up the point that the details that create a mood in a piece of writing are like the musical notes that create feelings in us as we listen to a song.

This activity may be used with many different types of music. I occasionally use Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons.* An interesting follow-up to this activity is to let students bring in their own choices of music and talk about what parts of the music they feel are most effective in creating a mood and what feelings are created. Certain pieces provoke a universal emotional response, but others provoke a wide range of responses, which can lead to a lively discussion of how individuals respond differently to what they hear and read.

Lynda M. Ware, Mount Anthony Union Middle School, Bennington, Vermont

Write What You Know

Teachers of writing like to say, "Write about what you know." This applies to all our students, and it's especially good advice for students who feel uncomfortable or intimidated by writing assignments.

My students are all teenage mothers. Many of them are reluctant readers and writers. I see my students twice a week during the postpartum period. After a brief time with me, my students return to their home campuses and regular teachers. I seize the opportunity to teach them about writing for this reason: they want to discuss what they've undergone. I use their writing to focus on skills such as elaboration, description, and organization.

I start by asking the girls to keep a writer's notebook about their recent experience having a baby. This notebook is to include about five entries.

After students have had time to write several pieces in their notebook, I arrange a group of three or four girls to read their writings. I include myself in the group to spur discussion because the girls tend to be shy—chances are that they are from different campuses and don't know each other.

After a few minutes of reading and when commonality has been established, discussion skyrockets. Remarkably, the girls begin to remember minute details of their labor.

After discussion, students add details to their writer's notebook. At this point I give a quick lesson on elaboration. I explain that elaborating is adding more details and more information, and that this helps readers to become involved and interested in the story.

Part of this lesson involves introducing students to an "elaboration packet." This packet contains a listing of sensory words and alternatives for widely overused words such as: *good, bad, nice, happy,* and *sad.* Students use this mini-thesaurus to help them with their word choices. I find this works especially well with middle-school students who don't yet have wide vocabularies to express their emotions and feelings.

After the first revision, we group again. This time I take myself out of the group. Instead, I remind students to look for sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste details. When finished, they rewrite their papers and exchange one last time to check for organization.

grammar, and spelling.

I choose to conduct any necessary grammar lessons on an individual or a group basis depending on the levels and weaknesses of the students. I gravitate toward individual conferences because, as Carroll and Wilson suggest in *Acts of Teaching* (Teacher Ideas Press, 1993), they "allow for intensity and individualization." They take longer, but since my classroom is nontraditional and smaller, I use the time for individual conferences.

After one last rewrite, my students submit all their rough drafts and their final draft. This whole process takes approximately three weeks. Students receive grades for their rough and final drafts, plus their group participation.

This process works well with my students because they are writing about what they know; they have a vested interest in their writing because the topic is theirs. Also, my students profit from a dual benefit: their writing skills improve and the skills transfer to any reading and writing assignment they will receive.

Kristina Castillo-Holder, School-Age Parenting Program—Community Education, San Antonio, Texas

House Stories

This is one of my favorite activities, for it gives students an experience with creating their own stories. From *Southern Living* and *Better Homes and Gardens,* I cut out pictures of houses. All of my house pictures contain no people, only houses. I mount all pictures on construction paper and laminate them.

Then I show my house pictures to students and let each student choose one. I tell them that we will be looking in the windows of our houses and, with our minds' eyes, seeing the people inside. Then we'll be writing short stories about these people. I ask students to include at least four people who are related in some way—whether a mother, father, and two children; a grandmother, two aunts, and a child; a father and three children, or some other variation.

If students choose to, they can begin their "House Story" by listing the characters by name and relationship the way a playwright does at the beginning of a play. Then they start writing the story

by choosing one of their characters and telling where that person is at that moment and what he or she is doing.

Next, students let something start to happen.

When students have spent a few minutes looking at their houses and imagining what they might write about, I model for students one way to get started. I choose a house of my own and make up my own story aloud in front of the class.

This is my house. (I hold it up and walk around the room showing it). *Let's see now what I see when I look in this front window. I see an old lady sitting in a rocking chair. Miss Hattie Junction. She is rocking slowly back and forth and holding out her hands, looking at them, and I can hear her humming a little tune. It sounds like "Amazing Grace." Wait! Somebody just walked in the room. It is a teenager. Yes, I recognize her. That's Eloise, her youngest granddaughter. Eloise is telling her something in a loud voice, and she sounds mad.*

What is so fascinating to me about this activity is that, there in front of the students, I find myself already interested in my own story, and so are they. When I tell them, "I have to sit down and write my story now," they don't want me to stop. I tell them I don't know what is going to happen, that "I have to write my story to find out." Often students begin to help me write my own story aloud. At this point students are excited and ready to begin work on their own stories.

The following student story is one of my favorites. I am including the student's first unedited draft, exactly as she wrote it.

> Once upon of time it was a big brown raggedy rusty house sitting way out in a pastor, in that house was a little old lady name Mae. And in the house she had one bed and also her dog Jim and on the outside of the house she had no windows almost no doors. A black raggedy skeelybug look like it never been crank. And way way down the other side of the pastor was two more people that was a lady and a man that stayed in a barn, and there name, were Lucy and Bobo, they had nothing to live for, they use to come visit Mae all the time, but see, Mae didn't have any food to eat except little stuff out in the yard.
>
> But one day Lucy and BoBo came to visit her with a

> big kroker sack in their arm. It was a kroker sack full of different kind of vegetables. Mae was very happy to see the food. She was all dancing around in her long granny dress old Jim was barking and Lucy and BoBo was very hap to.
>
> Every one gathered around Mae's one bed where they had put the food and they all had a wonderful feast.

This activity is always exciting to use, for I can observe the process of discovery as it takes over my classroom. I see my students complaining at the beginning and then losing control as their pencils run away with them when the creative process takes over.

Sandra Worsham, Baldwin High School, Milledgeville, Georgia

Lacking Transitions? Look for Help in the *National Enquirer*

I recommend the following effective and hilarious activity to teach the use of transitions in writing. It requires nothing more than a bunch of supermarket tabloids, a few art supplies, and some creativity. I suggest making the rounds of all the hair salons and doctors' offices in town to get donations of outdated tabloids.

Armed with copies of this unique form of news media, scissors, 5" x 7" index cards, and some tape or glue, you are ready for a project that will improve your students' writing and provide amusement for all.

The assignment is for students to design their own scripts for a broadcast of the evening news. *Saturday Night Live*'s version of the news is the inspiration for this assignment and a great model if you are looking for an example to share.

In this activity, students are to cut out one or two selected paragraphs from a story in the tabloids so that the excerpts make sense and explain the gist of the story. Students do this with about ten news stories, taping each segment to an index card. When they are finished, each student must decide what order to put the cards in for their presentation of the news.

Then, at the top of each card, each student writes a phrase or sentence that will serve as the transition from one story to the next. As the final product, students have their own outrageous scripts for the evening news. Presented orally, this activity will have the

whole class in stitches.

This first step makes students more aware of transitions in general. The follow-up step is to move students from looking at transitions in a humorous way to looking at transitions in real pieces of writing and in their own writing assignments.

I provide students with examples of student writing with effective transitions and allow time for examining and discussing them. I also ask students to find and bring in transitions that they think are graceful and effective in items they are reading out of class—magazines, newspaper editorials, and other documents. We discuss these, and then students review some of their own past writings to see if they think their transitions can be improved and to suggest alternatives. The results can be shared in pairs, small groups, or in class discussion.

This simple and entertaining activity can help students pay more attention to how they move from one idea to the next in their writing, as well as give them concrete examples to use as references.

Amanda M. Davis, Valparaiso High School, Valparaiso, Indiana

An Effective Method of Teaching the Friendly Letter

To learn the differences between the friendly letter and the business letter in preparation for our state-mandated writing test, we paired our ninth graders with seventh and eighth graders at a nearby middle school.

Each older student wrote a friendly letter of his impressions of senior high and advice on the adjustments the younger pupils would have to make. The letter had to be in proper form and contain, on a second copy given to the teacher, underlined transitions that indicated movement from one thought to the next.

The following is an example of such a letter:

November 17, 19__

Dear Michelle,

I am in the ninth grade at Sherwood High School. Even though you are not going to attend high school for another year, I am writing this letter to share with you some of the differences between middle school and high school. The

change from being one of the biggest people in the school to the smallest was a very difficult one to make.

So far, the transition has gone smoothly. Unlike middle school, there are many different sports that you can participate in. I am a wing back and kick returner for the junior varsity football team. We, like most sports, have practices in the summer before school and everyday after school. You can also play volleyball, soccer, basketball, or almost any other sport you can think of.

In middle school, you can join a few clubs. In high school, there are over thirty clubs to join and if you want, you can even start one of your own. In particular, my favorite club is FBLA, Future Business Leaders of America, because you get to go on a lot of field trips.

Sherwood, like most high schools, is tremendous in size. It can almost be compared to a mall. It is very easy to get lost, but any teacher or student will help you find your way. Eventually, you'll get used to your everyday routine. It took me about two days with a map and teachers' help. The work here is also more difficult. Most people have about two hours worth of written work each night. That doesn't include studying. Also, in middle school, college was just a dream. Now that I'm in high school, it's a reality. You not only have to keep up your grades, but you must write away to different colleges to find out their requirements.

I hope my letter has shed some light on what high school is all about. These next four years seem like they are going to be the best of my life. I look forward to receiving your letter. Feel free to ask me any questions that you have. Have fun in your last year of middle school, but I think you will like high school much better. I know I do.

Yours truly,

Jeff L.

In most instances, pen pals were established between our ninth graders and middle school students, and the freshmen felt they were truly performing a service in giving such "adult" advice to lower classmen.

A Follow-Up Celebrity Letter Assignment

We followed the friendly letter assignment with a business letter to a celebrity of the student's choice. In this letter, students requested an item that we could take to a local hospital for sick children for the upcoming holiday season, although admittedly, the students wanted a duplicate of the item sent to themselves to keep.

Again, we stressed the correct business letter format, use of transitions, the reason for selecting that person, and adequate detail.

The assignment was also challenging in that we had to find

names of agents and fan club addresses from magazines or the backs of record albums in order to get a response.

The students were very excited about choosing their own celebrity to write to, and whenever items arrived, they shared them with the class. We received everything from autographed photos to donated articles of clothing.

A sample of one of the celebrity request letters follows:

November 10, 19__

Mr. Alice Cooper
Renfield Productions
8033 Sunset Blvd., Suite 745
Los Angeles, CA 90046

Dear Mr. Cooper:

I am a freshman at Sherwood High School in Sandy Spring, Maryland. The reason I am writing to you is to request an autographed picture that will be donated to Children's Hospital in Washington, D.C. If possible, I would like an autographed picture too. Unfortunately, some of the children in the hospital will be in there over the holidays. As a result, our ninth-grade English class is writing to people we admire to ask them if they would send to us an artifact, memento, picture, or some item they hold dear so that we can take them to the hospital. We are going to be delivering them close to Christmastime.

I really admire your musical talent. A couple of my friends are really big fans too. There is not one song of yours that I don't like. I have all of your tapes. I was fortunate enough to see you on the David Letterman show last March, and you sang excerpts from past hits of yours. Instances like that endear you to audiences nationwide. You're one of my favorite singers. I hope that you never give up your singing.

I would really appreciate you sending those pictures. It would really mean a lot to one of those children (and me) to receive a personalized autographed photo from Alice Cooper.

Thank you for your time, Mr. Cooper.

Sincerely,

Christa Johnson

I found out that some of my students didn't know the proper method of addressing envelopes, so a short lesson might be needed at this time.

In this technological age, with the advent of e-mail and the Internet, you may have to justify the necessity of learning proper letter form, but only until the students see the "Help Wanted" sections of newspapers and read, "A letter of interest in this position should be mailed with your resume."

It's a natural follow-up from there to a lesson on writing resumes; you can do your students a favor by convincing them that even for summer and part-time work, well-written business letters and resumes often help one achieve success.

Kathy A. Megyeri, Sherwood High School, Sandy Springs, Maryland

Buddy Books

Mem Fox, well-known children's author, strengthened my belief in the importance of a "real" audience for my students in her book *Radical Reflections*. She reminds her readers that one important way to encourage a writer to "ache with caring" is to have him write for someone who matters. Only when he cares about his reader will he develop as a writer.

My attempts to find "real" audiences for my students' writing have brought newspaper editors, politicians, parents, other teachers, and pen pal programs into the classroom; however, my most successful "real" audience is the first-grade class at a neighboring elementary school.

I borrowed ideas from a variety of sources, including *Ideas Plus* and the *English Journal*, added my own ideas, and then created a writing project that is highly successful with my students. They not only write letters to these children, but also write and illustrate books for their buddies, with each child as the main character of his or her book.

Early in December, the first-grade teacher and I pair our students. We consider the personalities of both students and attempt to match students who we feel will be compatible.

I begin by introducing the Buddy Books Project, explaining that the culminating activity will be children's books that they write and illustrate. During the winter we write letters, create mini dramas on videos, and send drawings to the first graders. These exchanges generate enthusiasm and excitement for both classes.

In March we begin discussing our favorite children's books. Students write journal entries in which they describe the kinds of stories they loved as children. We discuss the importance of

meaningful themes, effective illustrations, humor, and characters who are involved in real-life situations. Next, we read many children's books, pointing out the use of rhyme, rhythm, repetition, alliteration, onomatopoeia, similes, and hyperboles. I remind my students that children's books are meant to be read aloud, and so they practice reading to each other, enjoying a wide variety of books.

After we study children's literature, we brainstorm questions to ask our first graders about themselves. The purpose of the individual interview is to learn more about our buddies because they will be the main characters of the book.

Near the end of March, the first graders visit us; we introduce the eighth graders to their buddies. Then my students begin their interviews. Afterwards, we serve refreshments and socialize. I take photographs which we will later include in our books.

The next day we return to our classrooms and begin writing, trying to incorporate the elements of children's literature that we discussed earlier in the month. We consider the content and length of the books; size of the books; number of illustrations; medium for illustrations; name of our publishing company; cover, title, and dedication pages; methods for binding our books (spiral bindings work best); and an about-the-author page. This page, the last page of the book, is autobiographical and stresses the writing experiences of each student. I encourage my students to "brag" about their accomplishments in writing! This page also contains the photograph of the buddies that I took the day the first graders visited us.

The first required assignment is a synopsis of the story. I read these, comment on them, and then have individual conferences. The next step is to write the book, hold a peer conference, and then self-edit. These steps take several days. Next, the story is given to me; I make suggestions to improve the content and discuss these with students. The finished product is then entered into the computer where I encourage student authors to individualize their stories even more. Drawing words and using boldface words or letters and different fonts enhance the story. Finally, we begin our illustrations. My students use colored pencils, markers, pastels, and oil paints; all of these have been successful. The finished books are then bound with spiral binders and shared in our own class.

While we are working on the books, the first graders draw self-

portraits for us to include on the dedication page. In addition, they continue to write us letters.

Finally, in the spring, we visit our buddies' school where we renew friendships and share our love for literature and writing. Each set of buddies finds a secluded spot on the playground to read and enjoy their books.

Buddy Books Project is one of our most rewarding experiences because students have a real audience. In addition, I know that the first graders also enjoy the project. Near the end of the school year last year, our first-grade teacher read *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein to her class; then she asked them to respond in their journals to this question: What would you give your tree? One little girl wrote, "I would give my tree love, and a buddy just like mine." This statement, as well as the smiles, hugs, and handshakes we received the day that we visited, have shown us how meaningful Buddy Books Project is to the first graders.

Jean Yaggi, Curtin Middle School, Williamsport, Pennsylvania

2 Literature

Reading and learning to read *well*—actively, thoughtfully, and critically—are invaluable activities for our students. Reading well prepares students for living well, by involving students in the life of ideas and opening them up to their own potential.

In the following teaching strategies, all focusing on reading and literature, students explore Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and the concept of the pilgrimage; popular music helps students make a connection with *Romeo and Juliet*; peer recommendations inspire students to read more; students respond to *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by writing about a place where they feel as "free and easy and comfortable" as Huck does on his raft; students think about what they value most in preparation for reading and discussing *King Lear;* and short film clips from different interpretations of *Hamlet* help students compare the artistic choices of actors and directors.

Another Way of Looking at a Blackbird

Reading and writing poetry are experiences that can enrich and inform one another. You can help students get started reading poetry by modeling how to go about reading and thinking about a poem.

For instance, students often find Wallace Stevens's poem "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" difficult to understand. (This poem can be found in Kenneth Koch's *Rose, Where Did You Get That Red?* [Vintage, 1973].) A little assistance from you can make all the difference. Use a reading-aloud protocol, where you orally read a portion and share the story of your thinking as it evolves.

A "read aloud" might go something like this (The actual words from the text are in bold face. My thoughts spoken aloud are in italics):

> *The teacher asked us to start by reading each stanza of this poem literally. I guess that each stanza should describe a different*

way of looking at a blackbird. Okay. Let's see.

Among twenty snowy mountains/The only moving thing/Was the eye of the blackbird.

I guess that if it were snowy and white and if the only thing moving was something as small as an eye of a blackbird, that would be rather significant. What a contrast—an eye of a blackbird and 20 mountains. Interesting.

I was of three minds, /Like a tree/In which there are three blackbirds.

What does he mean I was of three minds? Oh, I see, there are the three different minds of the three different blackbirds. They look the same, but are they? Do they all have the same kind of mind? What are they thinking? Hmmm.

The blackbird whirled in the autumn winds. /It was a small part of the pantomime.

I guess as the bird moved through the air whirling, it was like a dance, a dance against the background of the snowy mountains maybe. I guess the word pantomime makes me think this way, because pantomime suggests no movement. No that's not true. It actually means no speech. So I guess the bird doesn't speak, but as it moves through the air, it does make a statement, an artistic, dramatic statement using motion, as in a pantomime. . . .

Short protocols such as this one give students ideas about how to go about reading and thinking about poetry. To the degree your students' reading and thinking improves, their writing is also likely to improve. This technique is especially valuable for showing students that even for a practiced reader, understanding a poem is a process rather than an instantaneous act. Students feel more at ease in their explorations when they realize that questioning, reflecting, and revising one's responses are all natural steps in coming to an understanding of a poem.

To extend the learning, model this read-aloud technique with a variety of poems, and encourage students to try it for themselves, both individually and with partners or in small groups. Whether the poems in question are class assignments, students' own favorites, or poems written by peers, voicing responses in this way can clarify ideas, bring questions to light, and sharpen students' powers of understanding.

Edgar H. Thompson, Emory and Henry College, Emory, Virginia

Helping Reluctant Readers with a "Good Books! Bibliography"

A major difficulty for many of my reluctant readers in reading workshop is finding a "good" book for independent reading—one that they can enjoy enough to actually finish. Our student-generated "Good Books! Bibliography" helps with this problem in several ways—by making students more aware of the good books available, by using peer recommendations to increase the motivation to read, and by helping students feel more involved in the process of reading and talking about books.

Twice a semester, I have the students work in groups of four to add to the bibliography. They each use their reading response journals as resources. On the inside back cover of these spiral notebooks, the students have stapled a book log where they've recorded the titles of books they've checked out from our school's media center, in addition to authors' names and number of pages.

The students review their book logs and each chooses their favorite book from the current quarter. Then each student takes a turn recording on a chart the following information from another group member: the favorite book's title, its author, the number of pages, its category of fiction or nonfiction, and a two- to three-sentence annotation. The group members who are listening and writing help to make sure the speaker's annotations are clear.

I then put together the suggestions from all of my classes into one bibliography, separating fiction from nonfiction and alphabetizing books by author. Each of my students gets a copy, and we keep a copy in our media center. As the Good Books! Bibliography grows each semester, so does the percentage of reluctant readers who finally find a book that they can relish enough to read from cover to cover.

This activity is effective partly because it draws students into collaboration with others. It helps reduce the sense of isolation and intimidation that reluctant readers often feel at the prospect of reading. In reviewing their book logs and preparing the bibliography together, students naturally become more invested in the activities of reading and recommending books. And once students read a book or two that they enjoy, they're all the more likely to start another one.

Nancy Spaniak, Rich Central High School, Olympia Fields, Illinois

Where Is Your River?

> *We said there warn't no home like a raft, after all. Other places do seem so cramped up and smothery, but a raft don't. You feel mighty free and easy and comfortable on a raft.*
>
> —*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

Today's students face a fast-paced world and many modern stresses, along with the usual stresses of adolescence. As my students and I read *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and discussed the negative influences of society both in the novel and in our current American culture, I formed the idea for a personal writing response that would, like Huck's refuge from the "shore," elicit "free and easy and comfortable" feelings from the student writers.

There is more than enough conflict, whether in fiction or in real life, to write about, I thought; too many young writers, when asked to share their feelings, share stories of pain and struggle. While these stories often provide an outlet and certainly have their place, I wanted to encourage positive responses.

As we had discussed the theme of the River vs. the Shore in Twain's novel, I asked my students to respond to some simple questions: Where is your "river"? Where do you feel, like Huck Finn, peaceful and happy and comfortable? Then I asked students to write up a description answering these questions. As an example, I shared with students a writing I had prepared, describing a family cabin in northern Wisconsin where I experience those "free and easy" feelings.

Later, as I sat at my desk and read students' descriptions, I quietly rejoiced that these young people had their own places or past times that made them feel at peace. Here are some samples of my students' responses:

> My river is not exactly a place. It is the feeling I have when dancing. And although it's more of a mood, I do feel transported to my special dancing place in my mind. I become one with the dance. I will always find a peacefulness when dancing.

> The one place that I think compares to Huck's river would be my own room. When I am in my room, I can shut the door and shut out all my problems at home or school.

> My river is in Humboldt, Iowa. I like how quaint and old-fashioned the town is. Nobody locks a door or has to worry about how much trouble their kids are getting into. It's the kind of place where kids still play football in the streets.
>
> The place I go which is like Huck's river is the barn. When I'm there I am left alone with all the horses. It's like time stops. There is a certain wonder when a person gets up on a horse.
>
> My river is actually a river. The Wisconsin River flows past the end of my backyard. Sometimes when I'm stressed or upset, I take out the paddleboat. This helps me think and relax. It's peaceful, just like it is for Huck.

I saw in this activity genuine connection to the thematic literature. I read personal expressions of positive memories. And I hope that all readers, young and old, have their own "rivers." Ask your students for theirs.

Stephen Fisher, West High School, Wausau, Wisconsin

What Is Love?

Undeniably, Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* has much to do with love. While my students and I study Shakespeare's play and explore what love was like during the Elizabethan age, I like to use an activity that helps students make connections with what love is during the *present* age.

One of the most public expressions of love in our society is through popular music. I mention this to my students and ask them to estimate what percentage of contemporary songs have love as a main theme. We all agree that the percentage is high—some students estimate as high as 80 or 90 percent.

We spend a few minutes naming some of our favorite love songs, and then I assign the following group project, in which students analyze popular songs, try to discover what each song says or implies about our culture, and decide whether they agree or disagree. By examining familiar songs with a motive other than entertainment, students can become more critical listeners, and their increased objectivity and

insight helps us address love as a motivation and theme in literature.

Group Assignment

First, students in each group choose a love song. (The song title will double as the group's name.) Students may want to brainstorm in class for ideas and then take a day or two to research the possibilities. The song must be one for which they can find a cassette or CD recording to play for the class. Apart from this requirement, the song may be a current Top 40 hit or an older song, and any genre is acceptable. Family members and friends may be helpful in offering ideas; the music collections at local libraries are useful resources, though they may not have the most current selections.

Since all groups will eventually play their songs for the class, and time is limited, I ask that students try hard to find a song with a playtime of five to six minutes or less.

Once the song is chosen, each group discusses and analyzes their song with respect to the following questions. Students are encouraged to add and discuss their own questions in addition to those suggested here.

Suggested Questions

How does this song represent love?

What kind of image does this song paint in your mind? For example, is love a positive or negative experience for the singer (or character)? Why? Give evidence (specific lines, words) from the song to support your opinions.

Do you agree or disagree with the presentation of love in this song? Why?

Does this song present any symbols of love found in our present society? If so, what are they and how are they used to symbolize love?

What does this song tell you about how our society feels about love? Why? Use specific examples from the song to support your opinion.

Do you think this song conveys cultural values or opinions that are widely held? Why or why not?

Finally, each group prepares an oral presentation for the class, including the recording of the song and the group's analysis. Suggested length for the analysis is five minutes, for a total presentation time of

approximately ten minutes, depending on the playtime of the song.

Students generally find they have a lot to say about these songs. Though the words and message are familiar, students see them in a new light when they think of them as idealizations or generalizations about love. In addition to helping students look at literature, analyzing songs in this way helps students see links between popular messages and larger social and cultural issues.

Rose E. McCauley, Roosevelt Intermediate School, Westfield, New Jersey

King Lear's Losses

I have been using this exercise for so long that I honestly can't remember whether I borrowed it or invented it. However, I find that it works very well to help students make emotional connections with the text.

I begin by playing a recording of "My Favorite Things" from the *Sound of Music*. I ask students to make a list of their "favorite things." I point out that this list is not limited to tangible material possessions, but should include whatever the student values most in his or her life.

Then five or ten minutes later, as students are completing their lists, I announce that students must revise their lists to include only three or four things that students consider most dear to them. At this point, students often add, as well as delete, entries, becoming more abstract as they do so.

A few minutes later I break in again to tell students that they now may retain only *one* item from their list.

Students have a minute or two to select, and then I ask willing students to tell the class their very dearest thing. In addition to students who have chosen the latest CD or their favorite skateboard, there are always students who have listed more serious choices such as loved ones, bodily senses, freedom, and so on.

After students have shared their choices, I bring out lists that have been made in the past by students in other classes doing the same exercise. Students are always amazed at the similarities that exist among the lists.

As we go on to read the text of *King Lear*, we see how many of what we have called "our dearest things" Lear loses. At a number of appropriate points in the text, we even stop to rewrite the lyrics to "My Fa-

vorite Things" to reflect Lear's point of view as he loses the things most dear to him.

This approach tends to make students sympathetic and attentive readers of *King Lear*, and serves as an effective prewriting tool for our final essay assignment, which addresses themes of love, family relationships, coping, and the material versus the spiritual.

Grace Kratzenberg, Kenmore West High School, Buffalo, New York

Modern-Day Travelers

Older works of British Literature are often a hard sell to my students. The archaic language and simple lifestyles portrayed can be a turnoff to the Generation X'ers who grew up with rental movies and video games. However, if I can believe my critiques at year's end, my seniors find the study of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* one of the most enjoyable units of the year, thanks to the method described here. If you find this piece difficult for your students to comprehend and relate to, then this method might work for you.

Teaching the *Canterbury Tales* is done in stages, starting with students relating to comparable contemporary events, moving into the tales themselves, and coming back full circle to the present and to students' own pilgrimages—their journeys through high school toward graduation and other life goals. This unit helps students to see themselves as fellow travelers with the pilgrims of Canterbury, and to relate the "then" with the "here-and-now."

I begin by asking students to think of trips they have taken and what types of things they did to pass the time: telling jokes, singing, playing games, reading scary stories, etc. I then ask if they are "peoplewatchers," and if they have ever noticed the fascinating variety of people one sees while traveling. We move into creative brainstorming about who and what one might see while traveling, identifying "styles" of people by what they carry with them: camera buffs overloaded with cameras and lenses; athletes carrying tennis rackets, skiis, or hockey sticks; backpackers and hikers with topographical maps and canteens; mothers with babies and their paraphernalia, and so forth.

I now bring up the idea of going on a pilgrimage, and ask students to think about possible *motivations* for a modern pilgrimage. A typical list of ideas might look something like this:

- to get away from boring or stressful lives
- to feel renewed
- to be part of a group of people who accept you and like the same things you do, to feel a sense of belonging
- to honor something or someone important to you
- to find out who you are
- to make a difference in the world
- to turn your life around
- to challenge yourself
- to do something that makes you feel young

We next try to list *examples* of modern pilgrimages, and usually come up with a list that includes such events as Woodstock Revisited, the Indy 500, music concerts and festivals, climbing Mt. Everest, joining the Peace Corps or travelling somewhere to work as a volunteer, and New Year's Eve at Times Square in New York City.

Then I pose some questions for students to answer in writing as a homework assignment: How does dress, equipment, stance, and point of destination give evidence or clues to the personalities of the individuals involved in these modern "pilgrimages"? What do they wear? What do they take with them? What is their attitude? Do they travel alone or with a group? What does this imply? What message does each person wish to convey to the world at large?

The next day, we share and discuss responses to these questions, and at this point we are ready to begin reading the tales themselves.

I assign students to small groups, and assign each group a character or two. During the days set aside for reading, students are asked to pay special attention to the character assigned to their group. They are asked to notice and keep notes on how their character's dress, equipment, and soliloquy give evidence about the purpose, self-esteem, motivation, and philosophy of that person.

At several points during the reading, students are asked to meet in small groups to discuss the reading and compare notes on their assigned character. When the reading is completed, we hold a full class discussion on the tales and the various characters. Having student groups take responsibility for certain characters enriches the discussion, since each group tends to have more observations and deeper insights into the character they followed.

Students are also asked to brainstorm parallels and connections between *The Canterbury Tales* and modern times. One connection I like to make to get students started is to compare the sarcasm, wit, and elements of parody associated with the niece in the Canterbury Tales to similar characteristics in the *Doonesbury* cartoon strip, political cartoons in the daily paper, and excerpts from taped episodes of *Saturday Night Live*. If time allows, students can reform their small groups in order to research parallels between their group's character and modern-day celebrities and events in the news.

Finally, we connect the tales to students' lives by focusing on students' own pilgrimages. I ask students to think about their lives and what they envision for the future. What pilgrimage are they on now? What pilgrimage do they foresee in their future? Common events that students suggest as pilgrimages are graduating, getting a job, and going to college. I encourage students to ask themselves, in private journal entries, Where am I going? How will I get there? What do I want? Am I happy with the progress of my pilgrimage? Do my actions and choices fit in with my pilgrimage? Is there anything I can change about my life to help me reach my destination? These thoughts and speculations are for the students' benefit and are shared with the class at the student's own discretion.

The culminating activity is the "Circle," an activity that takes 30 to 40 minutes. It's important to note that this is not a beginning-of-year activity, nor is it necessarily suitable for every class or every group of students. I use it with groups of close-knit seniors who have interacted throughout the year in similar interpersonal activities.

Students stand in a circle clockwise, each facing to his or her left, and each carefully pins a large sheet of construction paper to the back of the student in front. Then I, as facilitator, call out prompts and questions for students to respond to on the back of the person in front of them. After each prompt or question, students intermingle randomly so that a new person is standing both in front and behind them. All comments must be positive and constructive; no sarcasm is allowed.

Typical prompts include the following:

1. What role do you see the person in front of you playing in life? leader? nurturer? adventurer? caregiver? some other role?
2. Describe a positive *physical* quality of this person—for instance, "penetrating eyes," "luminous hair," "stunning smile," "an infec-

tious laugh," etc.

3. Describe a strong personal *characteristic* of this person—for instance, "always friendly," "very persuasive," "a good speaker," etc.
4. What career do you envision for this person?
5. Ask this person something you really want to know.

After we complete the list of prompts once, I ask students to move randomly to create a new circle, and we repeat the activity. We perform the activity three times, and each time I try to replace one or two questions with new questions to keep the activity fresh. I might ask "What color do you associate with the person in front of you? "What flower is this person? What animal is this person?" The sheets of paper we use are large enough that usually all students can write their comments on the same sheet without turning it over or attaching a new one.

After we have done this three times, each student asks a classmate to remove the pin and the sheet of paper from his or her back, and each has the option of taking their sheet to one person in the class from whom they would like a response or answer to one of the prompts or questions. Then students are asked to return to their seats and quietly reflect on what their classmates have written about them. From their classmates' comments, students are asked to create tales or poems about themselves along the lines of Chaucer's tales, adding, deleting, and expanding on the original list of comments from their own points of view.

We arrange a day for these writings to be shared, and on this day students are asked to come to class in an outfit, including appropriate accessories or objects, that represents their personality and what they wish to communicate to their fellow travelers. I come to class prepared to take instant pictures, which we display next to students' writings after they've presented them to the class.

We usually complete this unit before the first parent conference. When parents enter the room, they look immediately for their child's tale and photograph—a nice note on which to start the conference.

My students love the Circle activity, and are always delighted and surprised by the responses from their peers. I swear them to secrecy so as not to ruin the surprise for students in other classes.

Using the above activities in conjunction with Chaucer's *Canterbury*

Tales makes the reading much more personal and relevant to students' lives, and the discussion and writing on some of life's big questions help students with their own life pilgrimages as well.

Suzanne G. Easterly, Killingly High School, Danielson, Connecticut

Using Varying Film Interpretations to Explore Scenes from *Hamlet*

Using short film clips to compare the artistic choices of actors and directors as students read *Hamlet* enlivens and illuminates the text. Using scene clips (readily accessible on video) grabs the students' attention immediately, sparks lively debate as to whether the actors are performing the play similarly to or differently from the way we already imagine it, and allows us to focus on the play *in performance* as Shakespeare originally intended. Through the comparison and contrast of the videos, we can explore issues such as:

- cuts,
- rearrangements of scenes, and
- directorial interpretations.

According to Michael LoMonico, author of " 'I Have Had a Most Rare Vision': Teaching Shakespeare with Video" in *Shakespeare Set Free: Teaching Hamlet and Henry IV, Part 1*, the advantages of using video clips are that they are *accessible*, *portable*, and, of course, *flexible*.

Among the actors whose interpretations of Hamlet are available on video are: Laurence Olivier, Nicol Williamson, Kevin Kline, Derek Jacobi, Diane Venora (in Joseph Papp's *Rehearsing Hamlet*—1982), Ian McKellen (in *Ian McKellen, Acting Shakespeare*—1982), Mel Gibson, and Kenneth Branagh.

Although I have used bits and pieces of each, the four versions I highly recommend are director Laurence Olivier's (1947), the PBS version directed by Rodney Bennett and starring Derek Jacobi (1979), Franco Zeffirelli's version starring Mel Gibson (1990), and Kenneth Branagh's (1996).

Some teachers may elect to show the films in their entirety following the complete reading and discussion of the play (see the April 1993 article, "The Thing's the Play: Doing *Hamlet*," in *English Journal*, pp.

65–67, by Wilbur H. Sowder, Jr.). I, however, prefer to show the videos in sections throughout our study of *Hamlet*.

Lesson Plan to Generate Lively Discussion about Film Interpretations

1. Using questions generated by the teacher and the students after the reading, the class discusses the scene thoroughly before viewing the film interpretations. This may, of course, be done first in small groups followed by large-group discussion.
2. Ask students to brainstorm ideas on how we might expect the scene to be staged, edited, what themes or plot elements might be emphasized, and so on.
3. Show one of the video versions and have students individually record comments as they watch in an ongoing personal "Videolog." In their videologs, students are asked to:
   a. Label each scene clearly.
   b. As they view, list what strikes, puzzles, intrigues, and bothers them about the scene.
4. After viewing the scene and completing their individual reactions, students meet in small groups to generate what is called a *PNI Inventory*—an inventory of "Positives, Negatives and Interesting/Intriguing" elements. One student in each group is chosen as the recorder. The recorder writes the name of the actor playing Hamlet at the top of a sheet of paper (or flip chart) and then divides the paper into a three-columned PNI chart, using the following three headings:

   Positives
   (elements of the scene thought effective and seeming to work well)

   Negatives
   (those actions or directorial choices that seemed ineffective or misinterpreted)

   Interesting
   (those elements that seem neither positive or negative but are, nonetheless, striking and "interesting")

   As each group member discusses his or her personal videolog, the

group will use the PNI chart to categorize their observations. The group's agenda is as follows:

1. Going around the circle, each person reads only one positive first. The group continues in this way until all the positives are read. Students can edit their individual lists if an observation or comment by someone in the group persuades them to do so.
2. Groups repeat the same procedure focusing on the negatives.
3. Groups discuss what was interesting and intriguing.
4. Each group is to come up with a consensus rating of the performance (10 is outstanding and 1 is very poor). They are asked to come up with three reasons why they have chosen that rating and to be prepared to share that with the large group.

After the small-group work, the teacher will lead large-group discussions. Ask the groups for their reactions, feedback on the performances, and ratings before showing the next clip. After the large-group work, the same procedure is followed for the next film clip.

Suggested List of Pivotal Scenes from *Hamlet* to Use to Compare and Contrast Cinematic Versions

I am recommending twelve sets of clips which I have found worked well in using film interpretations to explore *Hamlet*. For the first few sets of scenes, I have also included sample discussion questions the teacher might use.

First Set of Scenes: (1.1–2)* (stop at line 159)
(the opening scene where the audience meets the ghost of King Hamlet through Hamlet's first soliloquy)

The Laurence Olivier version
Note: For an interesting analysis of this film, see Chapter 2 of *Shakespearean Films/Shakespearean Directors*, pp. 31–63.

- Show the opening scene with ghost (1.1)

Here are some sample questions the teacher might pose about this clip:

1. Why did Olivier use the quote from the "vicious mole" speech (1.4) to open the film?
2. Why did the guards suddenly disappear?
3. What do you think about the camera angle on the stairs?
4. Is the image of the ghost what you expected? Did you like it?

*Scenes will be cited as per Chicago Manual of Style format. This reference is to Act 1, scenes 1–2.

5. How many times did the ghost enter?
6. The quote, "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark," is used here rather than where it actually appears in the text. Why might Olivier have done that?
7. Note the camera angle and focus on the thrones and the bedroom. Why might Olivier have done that?

- Show scene of Claudius' court (1.2–line159) through first soliloquy

Here are some sample questions the teacher might pose about this clip:

1. What transition was used from the last scene to this one?
2. How is Claudius' relationship with Hamlet and Gertrude portrayed?
3. What lines does Hamlet skip? Why?
4. Comment on Hamlet's mood both in court and in the soliloquy.
5. What is Polonius's role in this scene?
6. Comment on the interaction of Hamlet and his mother.
7. During the first soliloquy, do Hamlet's actions seem in control?
8. Do you fear for him?
9. At what point does he look up? Why?
10. Do you like the fact that his lips don't move during parts of the soliloquy?
11. When does he talk as opposed to "think" his lines?
12. In what way is the throne used?
13. Overall, did the scene work for you?

The Derek Jacobi (PBS) version

Show brief parts of the opening scene with the ghost (1.1) leading to Claudius's scene with the court through Hamlet's first soliloquy (1.2.159).

Here are some sample questions the teacher might pose about this clip:

1. What is Hamlet's attitude toward Claudius and Gertrude?
2. Comment on the interaction of Claudius and Gertrude.
3. Does Patrick Stewart's portrayal of Claudius fit your expectations?
4. Does Derek Jacobi portray Hamlet as you expected? Do you prefer his interpretation to Olivier's?
5. During Hamlet's first soliloquy, why do you think he chose to look right at the camera?
6. Is Jacobi's Hamlet more frightening? Do you fear he'll commit suicide?
7. Describe Jacobi's emotions and anger. Did it work for you?
8. What did he say as he looked at the throne(s)?

Mel Gibson's interpretation of Hamlet in Zeffirelli's version

Show the opening scene through Hamlet's first soliloquy (1.1.–2. 159).

Here are some sample questions the teacher might pose about this clip:

1. Did you like the opening scene in the crypt? Why did Zeffirelli choose to rewrite this scene in this way?
2. Did you like the changing of scenes/lines?
3. Would Shakespeare have liked it?
4. What does the opening scene do as far as explaining Hamlet's frustration?
5. Comment on Claudius's opening lines as he proclaims Hamlet as "the most immediate to the throne."
6. What do you think about showing the dead king in the crypt?
7. Why did Zeffirelli choose to move the scene with Laertes in the library?
8. Was Zeffirelli's choice effective in having Claudius chide Hamlet in private? Did it look like Gertrude prompted him?
9. Comment on Glenn Close's portrayal of the Queen. Is that how you imagine Gertrude?
10. During Hamlet's first soliloquy, why does he look out the window as he speaks?
11. The soliloquy ends abruptly with the line, "Frailty thy name is woman." Why? Do you approve of this cut?

The Kenneth Branagh version

Begin with Act 1.2, where Claudius addresses the court; show the film through Hamlet's first soliloquy.

Here are some sample questions the teacher might pose about this clip:

1. Based on studying the costuming, in what era would you say Branagh chose to place the film? Why?
2. How effective is the directorial choice that this scene takes place simultaneously as part of the wedding of Claudius and Gertrude?
3. How well do the flashbacks of Old Norway and young Fortinbras work?
4. Compare and contrast the way Derek Jacobi delivers his speech to Hamlet suggesting he should accept the death of his father to Patrick Stewart's in the PBS version. Which is more effective? Should Claudius be portrayed as more outwardly ruthless (as Patrick Stewart does) or as more slyly conniving and seemingly genuine (as Derek Jacobi does)?
5. How does Julie Christie portray Gertrude in this scene? Does she gravitate more empathy toward Hamlet or allegiance to Claudius?
6. How does Kenneth Branagh show Hamlet's distance—physically, emo-

tionally, metaphorically?

7. How is Ophelia's presence made important although she has no lines in the scene?
8. Talk about the transition from the court's departure to Hamlet being alone.
9. How does Branagh convince us of Hamlet's agony? Does it work?

Second Set of Recommended Scenes (1.3)
(Polonius family advice scene)

Zeffirelli version

Here are some sample questions the teacher might pose about this clip:

1. What kind of relationship does Zeffirelli seem to indicate Laertes and Ophelia have, based on how this scene is staged?
2. When Polonius is giving advice to Laertes, note how Laertes is constantly looking at Ophelia. What does the look on his face suggest?
3. Why does Zeffirelli have Hamlet eavesdrop on the scene? How does that directorial decision depart from the text? Is it effective?
4. Does Laertes's reaction to his father's advice suggest anything about whether or not he will follow his father's recommendations?
5. What can you infer based on Zeffirelli's directorial choices about the relationship between Ophelia and her father?
6. Does Polonius see Hamlet? Why is that important?

Branagh version

Here are some sample questions the teacher might pose about this clip:

1. What kind of relationship does Branagh seem to indicate Laertes and Ophelia have, based on how this scene is staged? How does this differ from Zeffirelli's choices?
2. When Polonius is giving advice to Laertes, what is suggested about their relationship by the way the two actors interact? Does Polonius seem closer to Laertes or Ophelia?
3. Most of this scene is set in a chapel. What effect does this choice of setting have on the scene and its significance?
4. How does Branagh abruptly change the mood when Laertes leaves?
5. What impact do the gate and the confessional have on the rest of the scene with Ophelia and her father?
6. Branagh intersperses the menacing tone of advice and Ophelia's panic with flashbacks of Ophelia and Hamlet together. What impact does this have on the audience?

7. What can you infer based on Branagh's directorial choices about the relationship between Ophelia and her father when they are left alone?
8. Which version is most effective in your mind?

Third Set of Recommended Scenes (1.5)

(Hamlet's interview with his father's ghost and Hamlet's soliloquy "O all you host of heaven!" and his discussion of the ghost with his friends)

Olivier version

Show Hamlet's second soliloquy (1.5. 92–112) only.

Here are some sample questions the teacher might pose about this clip:

1. Was the reenactment of the poisoning a good idea?
2. Explain why you think Olivier (as Hamlet) chooses the physical movement he does in this soliloquy.
3. Note Olivier's emphasis on the flood when he states, "O most pernicious woman . . ." Remember the connection of the flood to its use in Olivier's "To be or not to be" soliloquy.
4. Note Olivier's changes in mood and the calmness that comes over him.
5. Notice the use of the music. Was it effective?
6. How did you like the way Olivier said, "The time is out of joint"?

PBS version

Show the last part of the scene with Hamlet and his father's ghost through Hamlet's second soliloquy (1.5. 59–112) to the end of the act.

Here are some sample questions the teacher might pose about this clip:

1. How did you like the ghost and the choice of costuming?
2. Did Jacobi's emotional reaction seem effective to you?

   Note the following:
   - his writhing on the floor
   - his tears
   - his physical stamina

3. Why did Jacobi continue to hit his head with his hands?
4. Why did Jacobi decide to play Hamlet this way?
5. How did you like the way that Hamlet tells his friends the plan and the ghost's intervention in "swear"?
6. Does Jacobi's Hamlet seem capable of the task of revenge?

Zeffirelli version

Begin where Horatio and Hamlet are discussing Claudius' toasts through the "vicious mole" speech and continue to end of Act 1.3–1.5.

Here are some sample questions the teacher might pose about this clip:

1. How effective was it to have Gibson deliver Hamlet's "vicious mole" speech as he was looking down and watching Claudius?
2. Note when he states, "O most pernicious woman!" Was it effective?
3. In Hamlet's scene with the ghost, why did Zeffirelli choose to have Paul Scofield (the ghost) wear what he does?
4. How effectively does Gibson use a sword in this scene?
5. How does this ghost differ from the others?
6. How effectively is the ghost and Hamlet's parting portrayed?
7. How well does Gibson transition from the scene with the ghost to his second soliloquy?
8. What does Gibson do in his delivery of the second soliloquy to make it come alive?
9. How would you characterize the relationship of Hamlet and Horatio, based on the way they interact in this scene? Note especially these lines: "There are more things on earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy. . . ."

Branagh version

Show from the beginning of Act 1.5 through Hamlet's second soliloquy.

Here are some sample questions the teacher might pose about this clip:

1. Why is there so much emphasis on the ground?
2. Why all the flashbacks? Were they necessary? Effective?
3. Was the poisoning scene in the ghost's or Hamlet's head?
4. Do you like how the ghost is portrayed?
5. Why is there so much emphasis on the ghost's eyes and Hamlet's eyes?
6. How effective was Branagh's delivery of the second soliloquy?
7. Branagh elected not to have Hamlet write down his commitment to the ghost. Was that a good choice?

In the interest of space, rather than continue with detailed suggestions for questions, I have outlined below the scenes which have worked particularly well in comparison of directorial choices.

Fourth Set of Recommended Scenes (2.2)

(Polonius's "Brevity is the soul of wit" speech, Hamlet's letter to Ophelia is revealed, Polonius uncovers his plans to "loose" his daughter to Hamlet, Hamlet enters pretending to read a book and confronts the "fishmonger" Polonius)

Zeffirelli version

Show from Hamlet's entrance in Ophelia's "closet" to Hamlet and Polonius in the library until Polonius's exit.

Branagh version

Show from the news of Cornelius and Voltemand regarding Old Norway and Young Fortinbras until right before Rosencrantz and Guildenstern enter.

Note: Branagh chooses to have Kate Winslet (Ophelia) read the letter. There is also an interesting focus on Gertrude. What impact do these directorial choices have on the audience and possible interpretations of this scene? Look carefully at Branagh's fluctuations in voice and eye contact with Polonius.

Fifth Set of Recommended Scenes (2.2)

(Player's speech about Priam's slaughter and Hamlet's third soliloquy, "O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I."[2.2])

PBS version

Show from player's speech through third soliloquy (2.2. 456–617).

*1982 PBS presentation of Ian McKellen, in "*Acting Shakespeare*", of the player's speech and third soliloquy.*

First, McKellen talks about actors in Shakespeare's time.

Next, McKellen plays Polonius, Hamlet, and the Player who delivers the speech about Pyrrhus and Priam.

Finally, in modern dress, McKellen does Hamlet's third soliloquy.

Branagh version

Show Hamlet's third soliloquy (end of 2.2).

Sixth Set of Recommended Scenes (3.1–3.2. 89–407)

(Hamlet's fourth soliloquy, "To be or not to be" [3.1. 56–89] and Hamlet "Get thee to a nunnery" scene with Ophelia [3.1. 90–191] and the Players' scene [3.2. 92–407])

PBS version

Show fourth soliloquy through "Get thee to a nunnery" (3.1. 56–191).

Olivier version

Show fourth soliloquy through "Get thee to a nunnery" (3.1. 56–191).

Note: Olivier has Hamlet and Ophelia's (Jean Simmons) confrontation scene follow the "To be or not to be" soliloquy.

Kevin Kline version

Show fourth soliloquy through "Get thee to a nunnery" (3.1. 56–191).

Zeffirelli version

Start with Ophelia and Hamlet "Nunnery" scene through the play and stop right before Hamlet enters his mother's closet.

Note: Zeffirelli has Hamlet and Ophelia's (Helen Bonham-Carter) confrontation scene *follow* the "To be or not to be" soliloquy. Zeffirelli also inserts the "Get thee to a nunnery" line during the performance of *The Mousetrap*. I think the Zeffirelli version is very effective and has some interesting line changes which would spark much discussion.

Branagh version

Show fourth soliloquy through "Get thee to a nunnery" (3.1. 56–191).

Note: Branagh uses the mirrors in the scene in an interesting way. What is his purpose?

How does his interaction with Ophelia (Kate Winslet) from the time he first sees and talks with her differ markedly from the other versions?

Seventh Set of Recommended Scenes (3.2.)

(Hamlet's "Now I could drink hot blood" mini-soliloquy followed by King's soliloquy and Hamlet's "Now I might do't pat" soliloquy)

Branagh version

Start with Claudius discussing the impending trip to England and the importance of a king through the soliloquies ending right before the start of the closet scene.

Note: Observe the interesting reuse of the confessional in this intense scene. Hamlet is sitting in the other side of the confessional.

Eighth Set of Recommended Scenes (3.4.)

(the closet scene/confrontation scene between Hamlet and his mother)

Zeffirelli version

I choose to show only one of the closet scenes—the Zeffirelli version with Glenn Close, Mel Gibson, and Paul Scofield.

Ninth Set of Recommended Scenes (4.2–3)

(Hamlet has hidden the body; Claudius confronts him about it.)

Zeffirelli version

Start with Gibson's entrance to the room where Claudius is ready to ques-

tion him through the part where Zeffirelli zooms in on Claudius's sealed letters.

Branagh version

Start with Ophelia awakened by soldiers through Hamlet's scene with the king and ending with Ophelia's cries.

Note: Ophelia has been more physically present in the movie than her lines indicate.

Tenth Set of Recommended Scenes (4.5)

(Ophelia's "mad" scene)

Zeffirelli version

Start with Ophelia singing one of her songs to the guard outside and continue until her exit.

Note: Consider Helen Bonham-Carter's interpretation of Ophelia's madness.

Branagh version

Start with Gertrude's aside before Ophelia comes in.

Note: Compare and contrast Kate Winslet's interpretation of madness, particularly through the use of the songs.

Also note the use of flashbacks to help the audience understand her songs better.

Consider what is implied about the closeness of Laertes and Ophelia.

Eleventh Set of Recommended Scenes (5.1)

(the "gravediggers" scene)

Zeffirelli version

Start from the beginning of the gravediggers' scene to the funeral procession.

Branagh version

Start from Hamlet and Horatio's entrance as they come upon the gravediggers through the exit of Laertes and Claudius and Gertrude.

Note: Observe particularly how Branagh begins to show the distance developing between Gertrude and Claudius.

Twelfth Set of Recommended Scenes (5.2)

(Hamlet and Horatio discussion, the fencing match, the end of the play)

Zeffirelli version

Start from Horatio and Hamlet's discussion prior to the last scene (5.2. 210–405).

Branagh version

Start with Osric's departure and Horatio and Hamlet's discussion about the "fall of a sparrow" through to the end of the play.

Note: Observe how Fortinbras is portrayed in this scene and what the breaking apart of Old Hamlet's statue at the end of the movie implies.

***For More Information on Using Video to Enhance Teaching* Hamlet**

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Linda Wallenberg, Eden Prairie High School, Eden Prairie, Minnesota

3 Explorations

Among the innovative explorations included in this chapter are a student-centered approach to planning service learning projects; a suggestion for giving student experts center stage in the classroom; a way to use color to help both teacher and students see patterns in students' writing; and a 3-D poster project that gives full rein to students' creative powers.

Student-Designed Community Service Learning

Many community leaders, educators, and parents have shown interest in expanding community service learning programs. Here's a model for developing service learning programs that truly engages students and ensures their full investment—it's a project that involves upper elementary and middle school students in selecting and designing service learning experiences and projects that reflect their own input, talents, and concerns.

This idea came about one evening as I was reading an article about college students traveling the borough of Queens to help high school students fill out their college applications. At first I thought the approach described could serve as an inspiration for our middle school students to travel to elementary schools to talk about special school programs and help parents fill out the applications. But then I had another thought—was I identifying potential student service opportunities through newspaper reading, when I could directly involve students in selecting and designing their *own* news-inspired projects?

I arranged to try this out with two classes of my own seventh-grade students and with a colleague's fifth graders. In initial discussion, I found that students had little notion of community service possibilities beyond holiday gift-giving to a children's ward at a neighborhood hospital and a letter-writing project in place at the local senior center. To begin, I decided to give each class at least half an hour in class to brain-

storm lists of potential learning projects in their own home neighborhoods or within easy walking distance of our schools.

Students' initial ideas didn't display a very diverse range of activities, and tended to be limited to ideas derived from family members' personal volunteer work (such as delivering neighborhood meals to elderly shut-ins, volunteering at soup kitchens, and so on). The students' brainstorming lists were dated and posted in their classrooms.

Next, students in each class were given a week's time for more in-depth research using all available news sources. They read local and neighborhood newspapers and magazines, listened to and watched radio and TV news programs, and explored news sites on the Internet. They were asked to keep a list of any news article, report, or Internet page that gave them an idea for a community service project. They were to clip, photocopy, or print out each article, write down relevant source information, and explain each idea. Students were also encouraged to develop ideas by discussing the news items they identified with their family, friends, and neighbors.

My colleague and I were pleasantly surprised by the results of this independent research project. Students had amassed an impressive collection of clippings, file folders, and lists of ideas.

Among them were:

- Several clippings and a Web citation for the October 25th *Make A Difference Day*, an annual event in partnership with the Points of Light Foundation, where volunteers meet local needs through various projects.
- A full-page advertisement detailing the work of Earthshare, which supports local and regional environmental efforts.
- Six columns from daily English, Spanish, and Chinese language newspapers which answer immigration questions and help non-native New Yorkers.
- A newspaper profile of "Heroes among Us" with stories of ordinary people who rescued others from fire, drowning, and accidents.
- Information and phone numbers from cancer support groups.
- A series of advertisements for the New York Cornell Medical Center which profiled "everyday heroes" such as nurses, coordinators, and candy stripe volunteers.
- The story of a neighborhood group who held a fund-raiser dinner

dance to help families displaced when their Brooklyn apartment building collapsed.

- A newspaper story about the UNICEF drive to assist child laborers in the world.

As the articles and ideas were shared and posted, many of the students had not one, not five, but twenty or more potential service learning resources. In fact, many students had to be persuaded to pick only their best ideas to share, so that others would have the opportunity to participate.

After sharing and class discussion of these ideas, students returned to their lists and selected one or two ideas to think about and develop in more detail. Students thought seriously and came up with suggestions and ideas for adapting, working with, or participating in specific service learning projects. Among the suggestions were these:

- Let's get in touch with the Point of Light Foundation to get a list of projects in our borough (the Bronx). Then we could go check out some of them to see which we could work with. Maybe we could also get someone from one of the projects to visit us to explain how we could design our own project and what we need to know to get adult partners and businesses.
- My aunt had Breast Cancer two years ago and my grandmother died of Breast Cancer at 40. I would like to work on getting out Breast Cancer Support Group, Resources, and Helpline information in Spanish. We collected a lot of information on Breast Cancer services, but I don't know if Spanish-speaking people who live in the neighborhood can read all these English announcements. Could we team up with the parent who does Spanish translations here to do a Spanish Language Breast Cancer Resource directory?
- Getting answers to questions about immigration is really important. My cousin from the Dominican Republic borrowed $500 to go to an immigration lawyer. I wonder if he could have read the answers to his problem for free somewhere. Could we find some way to print answers to questions for new immigrants? Or some way to help people like my cousin so they don't have to pay lawyers hundreds of dollars and go into debt?
- I want to open up our computer lab and help people in the neighborhood near our school and kids at the church after-

school tutoring center get on the web. That way they can do their own research and also they will learn how to use the web to find out about jobs and schools. We need a few members of our Webmaster group and a teacher to supervise. The school is open late for GED classes anyway.

My colleague's fifth-grade class evolved a similarly rich array of potential service learning projects derived from their reading.

My elementary colleague and I hope to support our students in finding ways to pursue some of their service learning project ideas. But the brainstorming and research process alone is instructive and valuable. It makes students aware of the variety of needs and opportunities present around them; it gives them a sense of responsibility for their family and community; and it shows them that they are capable of identifying these needs and finding ways to respond. What better way to help students become effective, involved community members than to let them generate and pursue community service opportunities based on their own research and interests!

Rose Reissman, Community School District #1, Brooklyn, New York

That Was Then & This Is Now

This idea works well as an introductory activity early in the school year. In writing and art, students explore how they have grown and changed from their early years to the present. Through preparing a paper and a collage on the theme, "That Was Then & This Is Now," students work on comparing and contrasting, develop details in writing, and get to know their classmates better.

Begin by engaging students in a discussion about some of their earliest memories. Next, distribute copies of the list below and ask students to complete as many of the items as they can and to add items of their own. (You may want to brainstorm your own list with your students.)

"That Was Then & This Is Now" Writing Prompts

Fill in the blanks below.

That Was Then

At age _____, my favorite pastime was _____.

My best friend was:
Some of my other friends were:
My favorite book was:
My favorite TV show was:
My favorite band or singer was:
My room looked like this:
I wanted to become:
When I needed/wanted to talk to someone, I usually went to:
If I got in trouble, I would:
The thing I valued most was:
The person I respected most was:
As a student, I was:
I was mainly concerned with:
The accomplishment I was most proud of was:

This Is Now

Now, at age _____, when I have free time I like to:
My best friend is:
My other friends include:
My favorite book is:
My favorite TV show is:
My favorite band or singer is:
My room looks like this:
Now my goal is to become:
If I need to talk with someone, I normally go to:
If I get in trouble, I:
At this time, the thing I value the most is:
The person I respect most is:
As a student, I am:
Today I am mainly concerned with:
The accomplishment I am most proud of is:

Students bring the completed sheets to class the next day for a general discussion. Then I ask students to write a short paper comparing their early selves with their current selves. It may be helpful to talk a little about the format of the paper before students get started. Students aren't required to include every item from their lists in their papers.

nor should they simply rewrite the statements from their sheets. The idea is for students to use the information on the sheets as a basis for developing more detailed observations and reflections about what they were like when they were younger, what they are like now, and how they have changed.

For example, students might select several points that they find interesting about how they have changed and elaborate on them; or, if they believe they haven't changed much in some ways, they can write about why that is the case. In my classes, we normally take this paper through two or three revisions before students feel their papers are finished.

There's a visual component to this assignment as well. I give students the option of bringing in one or more photos from their early school years and from more recent times, illustrating the differences between their early selves and their current selves. Students may also choose to use drawings or magazine pictures as illustrations, if they prefer. These photos or other images are used in "Then & Now" collages.

Students are free to use their creativity in designing their collages, and they aren't limited strictly to a collage format. Some students arrange their art on sheets of poster board in two groups ("Then" and "Now"); others may create three-ring booklets; others may design personal magazines with headlines, captions, and newspaper articles from different years of their lives.

Students give each other feedback and advice while developing their papers and collages, and then present their final writings and collages to the class on a voluntary basis. In the past, I have displayed these pieces together in the school library and posted them up on bulletin boards along with student papers for Open House and parent conference nights.

Don Burns, Mt. Healthy High School, Cincinnati, Ohio

Experts Share Their Skills

This activity is one which I've used at the college level and which I believe could be valuable for students at many levels.

As a composition teacher, I learn a lot about my students through their writings. By the end of the semester, I'm familiar with their interests, hobbies, biases, and goals. Often I learn something that is

unique to that student and I'm eager to hear more; moreover, I'd like the rest of the class to know what an unusual individual their fellow classmate is.

Recently, when trying to think of new ways to keep the lesson interesting while teaching steps in note-taking, summarization, and essay examinations, I recalled that a student named Carolyn had written a process analysis paper discussing how to paint on china. I asked her if she would be willing to demonstrate the process to the class as a springboard to a writing assignment. She was pleased that I remembered her special skill, and was quite willing to share her talents.

After I gave the class a lesson on listening skills and note-taking, Carolyn gave her presentation on china painting along with a number of visual aids and samples of work she had done. Her classmates asked for elaboration and clarification where needed.

Then I asked students to use their notes and comments in a one-page summary describing the process of china painting. When I collected the summaries, I first gave them to Carolyn, who checked to see if the writer had accurately described the process. The following day, I collected the papers from her and graded them in the usual manner. I was pleased with the assignment because the resultant writings were substantive, the students were interested, and Carolyn received special attention from her peers.

Hoping to duplicate this success, I asked a student who was a travel agent to give a talk on how to travel on a very limited budget. Again, students' interest was piqued and the papers were very good. I continued to call upon my students (about once every two weeks) for short presentations to share their special talents. A meat wrapper in a supermarket discussed how to buy the best meat for less money; a Disneyland employee described the park's activities when Disneyland is closed; a student who works in an emergency room explained emergency medical treatment.

Each time I asked a student to make an oral presentation, I pointed out that it was strictly voluntary, yet none declined the opportunity to talk on his or her special subject. In addition to writing assignments on note-taking, outlining, and summarization, I incorporated lessons on effective openings, conclusions, organization, direct quotations, and accurate reporting of facts.

By the end of the semester, the class had improved their skills, I had some excellent papers, and the students had interacted with one an-

other in a supportive learning experience.

All of these benefits would apply equally to students at the middle school and high school level. Though younger students would be unlikely to talk about job experience, they would still have diverse skills, talents, and hobbies to share with the class. Computer games, cooking, dancing, bike repair, sailing, skateboarding, farmwork, gardening, and other skills could all lend themselves to dynamic "expert" presentations in the classroom, and would contribute to students' self-esteem and peer respect as well.

Elizabeth Macey, Rancho Santiago College, Santa Ana, California

Adding Color to Student Essays

Searching through second drafts of students' essays for revised words, phrases, or paragraphs can be very time-consuming. With 120 freshmen and sophomore students regularly handing in their originals and revisions, I needed a simple way to see what changes had been made and to compare the revised sections to the original. Here it is:

I ask my students to highlight all of their revisions in yellow. Then they staple their originals to the back of these revised drafts and submit both to me. Since most of my students' work is now computer generated, I usually find the corrected areas in the same location as the originals. I can quickly tell if a student is having trouble with a revision. This method helps me make sure that students don't ignore minor corrections such as punctuation and spelling. And students themselves have discovered that highlighting their corrections helps them recognize a pattern to their mistakes. Conferencing time after the second draft is usually shortened because it is easy to locate the problems in question.

Highlighting has other advantages when composing or revising essays. After a lesson on a particular concept such as the complex sentence, for instance, I might ask students to experiment with using several complex sentences in their next essays, and to highlight them in orange. Or after we have discussed and worked with transitions, adverbs, or concluding sentences, I might ask my students to highlight that element with another color. It helps me get an immediate sense for whether students have understood the material or if we need more work in a certain area.

Highlighting helps students focus closely on areas they're working on in their writing, and often during highlighting they discover errors or things they want to change on their own, before they even hand the pages in. Adding color to their essays gives the revision process a whole "spectrum" of possibilities!

Rita Achenbach, Holy Name High School, Reading, Pennsylvania

Visual Essays

The idea of having students create a "visual essay," or poster, as a way of responding to a new concept or a work of literature has been around for a while, but I recently decided to add some "depth" to the assignment by asking students to make their visual essays three-dimensional.

I often use this assignment with a unit on heroes, in which I ask students to develop their own personal definitions of the term. I have also used it with groups studying the history of the English language, where they decided on the four most important periods to be shown on the poster and collaborated on its creation. The process of designing and creating the poster encourages critical thinking and involves students in reflection on content and in organizing their ideas.

We begin our development of definition through exposure to others' ideas of what constitutes a hero. We talk about superheroes, sports heroes, and real-life heroes. We read traditional literature to see what other times and other cultures have considered heroic: Odysseus, Gilgamesh, Roland, and David and Goliath. We also read some more current pieces I collect from magazines and newspapers, and we view *The Journey of August King* as part of our discussion about how many people a person needs to affect to be a hero. After exposure to a variety of viewpoints about heroes, students are encouraged to develop their own definitions and present them in three-dimensional visual essays.

In developing the definition, students are asked to determine a minimum of three criteria, and they need to make sure those criteria are truly different and not just renaming of the same trait—*courage* and *bravery*, for instance. They are asked to determine in their own minds the limits of each part of their definition. For instance, if they say strength is a trait of a hero, do they mean physical strength or mental strength? If they say a person is a hero for helping others, does it count

as heroic if helping is part of that person's job, as it is for a fireman or policeman, for example?

Once students have developed several distinct aspects of their definitions, they find examples as support. They are asked to find a variety of types of support: pictures, articles, headlines, poems, song lyrics, and so on. These can be cut from magazines or newspapers I've assembled in the classroom, or photocopied if they are from other sources. After students have collected adequate support for each aspect of their definitions, they are ready to create their posters, using posterboard and art supplies assembled in the classroom.

I suggest that students think about organization and prioritize their ideas and the elements they've collected before they begin, since this will help them plan their design. Is compassion more important than courage? Or is risk-taking more important than both? Is there one image or written element that expresses their definition best?

The design is up to the student, but students are asked to use their arrangement and the 3-D nature of the poster to reflect the importance of each aspect of the definition. For example, a student might highlight an important item by causing it to stick out the most from the poster, or, alternatively, by placing it flat on the page in a prominent position and having other less important aspects float around it at varying distances. My students tend to place the least important element in the definition flat on the board, but I leave these artistic decisions up to students. To create the differing depths, I provide students with corrugated cardboard, which they can cut and glue in stacks of differing heights. Students can also use Styrofoam, and I've even had students use egg cartons or stacks of pennies!

The finished products are always a pleasure to view. Students are anxious to show and explain their own posters and interested in seeing others'. The personal nature of the definition and the way that definition is expressed create ownership for the student. I am always pleased at the depth of thought and personal "voice" reflected in the finished products. And later on in the course, when we discuss thesis statements, developing support, and organizing ideas in writing, we have concrete evidence that students can relate to in understanding those abstract concepts.

Deborah Dean, Kentlake High School, Kent, Washington

Indexes

Author Index

Achenbach, Rita—"Adding Color to Student Essays," 50

Burns, Don—"That Was Then & This Is Now," 46

Castillo-Holder, Kristina—"Write What You Know," 10

Davis, Amanda M.— "Lacking Transitions? Look for Help in the *National Enquirer*," 13

Dean, Deborah— "Visual Essays," 51

Easterly, Suzanne G.—"Modern-Day Travelers," 27

Fisher, Stephen—"Where Is Your River?," 23

Gerken, Eve M.—"Empowering Students to Invent Stories," 7

Kratzenberg, Grace—"King Lear's Losses," 26

Macey, Elizabeth—"Experts Share Their Skills," 48

McCauley, Rose E.—"What Is Love?," 24

Megyeri, Kathy A.—"An Effective Method of Teaching the Friendly Letter," 14

Spaniak, Nancy—"Helping Reluctant Readers with a 'Good Books! Bibliography'," 22

Reissman, Rose—"Student-Designed Community Service Learning," 43

Thompson, Edgar H.—"Another Way of Looking at a Blackbird," 20

Wallenberg, Linda—"Using Varying Film Interpretation to Explore Scenes from *Hamlet*," 31

Ware, Lynda M.—"Using Instrumental Music to Explore Mood," 8

Worsham, Sandra—"House Stories," 11

Yaggi, Jean—"Buddy Books," 17

Subject Index

Classroom Management

"Adding Color to Student Essays"—Rita Achenbach, 50

Interdisciplinary

"Buddy Books"—Jean Yaggi, 17
"Student-Designed Community Service Learning"—Rose Reissman, 43
"Using Varying Film Interpretations to Explore Scenes from *Hamlet*"—Linda Wallenberg, 31
"Visual Essays"—Deborah Dean, 51
"What Is Love?"—Rose E. McCauley, 24

Literature

"Another Way of Looking at a Blackbird"—Edgar H. Thompson, 20
"Helping Reluctant Readers with a 'Good Books! Bibliography'"—Nancy Spaniak, 22
"King Lear's Losses"—Grace Kratzenberg, 26
"Modern-Day Travelers"—Suzanne G. Easterly, 27
"Using Varying Film Interpretations to Explore Scenes from *Hamlet*"—Linda Wallenberg, 31
"What Is Love?"—Rose E. McCauley, 24
"Where Is Your River?"—Stephen Fisher, 23

Personal and Interpersonal Exploration

"King Lear's Losses"—Grace Kratzenberg, 26
"Modern-Day Travelers"—Suzanne G. Easterly, 27
"That Was Then & This Is Now"—Don Burns, 46
"Where Is Your River?"—Stephen Fisher, 23

Public Speaking

"Experts Share Their Skills"—Elizabeth Macey, 48
"What Is Love?"—Rose E. McCauley, 24

Research

"Student-Designed Community Service Learning"—Rose Reissman, 43

Writing

"Adding Color to Student Essays"—Rita Achenbach, 50
"Buddy Books"—Jean Yaggi, 17
"An Effective Method of Teaching the Friendly Letter"—Kathy A. Megyeri, 14
"Empowering Students to Invent Stories"—Eve M. Gerken, 7
"Experts Share Their Skills"—Elizabeth Macey, 48

"House Stories"—Sandra Worsham, 11

"Lacking Transitions? Look for Help in the *National Enquirer*"—Amanda M Davis, 13

"That Was Then & This Is Now"—Don Burns, 46

"Using Instrumental Music to Explore Mood"—Lynda M Ware, 8

"Write What You Know"—Kristina Castillo-Holder, 10

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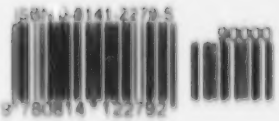

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